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Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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delightful inmate of the House of Heart, and is continually bringing an ingathering of joy. It is so good and pleasant to notice a trait of unselfishness here, of delicacy there, of honour elsewhere; to observe and treasure the record of the beauty of perfectness in any man's work, whether the work be a great poem or the sweeping of a room. It is such a happy thing to discriminate peculiar beauties in another country and find traits of character that differ from our own in people of another nationality. Life has no greater joy-giver than Appreciation, and though this Appreciation is the due of others and our duty towards them, we get more than we give, for there is no purer pleasure than that of seeing the good in everything, the beauty in everyone. Depreciation is the sneering Dæmon who goes about to oust this genial servitor of Justice. There are people for whom neither the weather nor their dinner, their abode nor their company is ever quite good enough. You remark when they come down, "What a beautiful morning!" They answer, "Yes, it is fine *to-day*," with a depreciatory reference to a day that is past. "What a nice woman Mrs. Jones is!" "Yes, if she did not wear such dreadful garments." "I enjoyed the Black Forest so much." "Oh, did you; there's always such a lot of Germans in the hotels." And so goes on the depreciatory person who goes through the world like a cuttle-fish, ready at a touch to blacken the waters about him. It is well to remember that Depreciation is Injustice. The depreciative remark may be true so far as it goes, but it is false in spirit, because it takes a part for the whole, a single defect for many excellencies. Depreciation may be inspired by the monster Envy, who is perpetually going about to put stumbling-blocks in the way of Justice, and belittle the claims of others, or it may arise from Thoughtlessness, which is but a form of Self-occupation. Many of the crude and unworthy criticisms we hear of books, pictures, speeches, a song, a party, arise from the latter cause. We would not allow ourselves to depreciate if we recollected that Appreciation is one part of the Justice we owe to the characters and the works of others.

ALFRED.

(A Play for Children.)

[The scenes take place for the most part in the house of Earl Cedric, where Alfred is being educated. Elfrida, a ward of Cedric, is a woman of refinement, and exercises much influence over Alfred, encouraging him and suggesting the different ways in which he can help his country. Elfrida is to be betrothed to Ruan, Prince of Cornwall. Unable to come in person, Ruan sends Hengor, one of his noblemen, as proxy. Hengor proves to be a traitor, and plans to assassinate the King and to carry off Elfrida for himself. This is discovered by Editha, Elfrida's tirewoman. The King is saved and Hengor slain. In the last scene Ruan arrives in person to fetch his bride.]

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

Ethelbert. King of Wessex.
Alfred. Ethelbert's brother.
Earl Cedric.
Beric. Cedric's Son.
Beowulf. Warder.
Rolf. Beowulf's son.
Bishop of Wimborne.
Ruan. Prince of Cornwall.
Hengor. Cornish nobleman.
The Lady Elfrida. Cedric's ward.
Editha. Elfrida's tire-woman.
Followers of Hengor.
Followers of Ruan.

ACT I. SCENE I.

Evening. Earl Cedric's Hall. Enter Alfred and Beric.

Beric. Rarely have we seen such sport. The poor beast which bore me is well nigh spent, and I must look to it his food is warm and good to-night.

Alfred. Rightly speak you! Did you see the stag as he left the comb, how proudly he set forth upon that race which was to prove his last?

Beric. Aye! grand he looked, and scornfully he shook his antlers before he fled across the heather. (*Enter Beowulf.*) Ha, Beowulf, you look sad for such a cheery day. Have you aught of ill to tell, my friend?

Beowulf. Alack! alack! my fine young sir, were I of your youth and strength, I had other hunt to follow than yon fine stag that lies within the gates. Methinks my heart will burst to hear of these Danish dogs and to see the ruin they wreak where'er they go. Alack!

(Beowulf is going, when Beric lays his hand on his arm.)

Beric (jestingly). So, you would counsel us to hunt Danes rather than stags! Ha, ha, can you not see, man, that the stag hunts not man, and that rather would we follow than be followed!

Alfred. For shame, Beric: you know not all you say! Come, Beowulf, I am ever ready to hear your sorrows. Tell this last grief.

Beowulf. 'Tis ever the same story, my good young master. To-day I chanced to light on Guthrun's farm; once all was prosperous there; the rich harvests were stored in plenty, and baking and brewing went on bravely. To-day, how changed! The barn stands empty; the cattle are gone; the house is a ruin, and all because the Danes have passed that way.

Alfred. It is so, Beowulf? Small wonder that your warm heart grieves!

Beowulf. Such sights make me feel like some beast ensnared. When *will* our poor country be free?

Beric. Hey, man, be not so sad! Use should make you treat these matters less mournfully. Since your master's house is safe, why should you grieve for the fate of strangers? Well, you are too old, you say, to hunt the Dane or e'en the stag, yet can you make such mash for my good beast as makes him neigh to see you coming. Come now with me!

Beowulf (chuckling). Aye, young master, I'll come!

(Exeunt Beric and Beowulf.)

Alfred. Alas! what sorry state is this! Homes desolate, lands laid waste, all Wessex turned into one great man-deserted waste. All Saxons harried by the Danes! *(Enter Elfrida.)* How can this weak arm and suffering frame avail to help my country?

Elfrida. Alfred! do you speak thus? And yet your heart must sink, seeing the sorrow and desolation around you. 'Tis right to grieve, for one day, when the crown is yours, the sorrow of each subject must be yours; the joy of each

be yours too. Joy! you smile! Yet stay and think on all that can be won by brave heart and steadfast purpose.

Alfred. Elfrida, how dare I face the future? 'Tis like wending my way through an unknown moor in the blackest night. Hope fails me.

Elfrida. But have you not already talked with me of all that may be done when Thane unites with Thane to chase the foe? Now, all places are weak; but when power is yours, many towns shall be made strongholds where the weak may be sheltered and defence will be sure.

Alfred (sighing with relief). Ah, I already take courage and feel the cause not so helpless as it seemed!

Elfrida. Alfred, my mind's eye gives me a vision of your greatness, and sees you successful in your hopes for the country which has such need of you. I know your fears, but, to your comfort, know that he who learns the lesson of self-discipline as you are learning it, is fittest of all men to rule and be obeyed. Your task is heavy, but its fulfilment will be a glorious work.

Alfred. I pray you take my thanks for that help which never fails from you. The plans of which you speak are surely mine, but as surely they were yours at first and through you mine. May I show my thanks by fulfilling your dreams for me.

SCENE II. *Hall of the Earl.*

Editha, decorating. Enter Rolf with mistletoe, etc.

Rolf. God e'en, Lady Editha, you seem in merry mood.

Editha. Faith, sir, you have hit wide of the mark this time, for I am wearied out trying to hang this ill-fated holly.

Rolf. Then have I come in a happy moment, lady. Let me help you.

Editha. Nay, I will e'en do it myself. But, see now, there is plenty for an able body to do. This hall must all be decked before the reception. I would the Prince had come himself to the betrothal of my lady; but they say Lord Hengor is a proper man. Why, life is festive nowadays, what with my lady's betrothal, and the war, and the king, and Prince Alfred back again.

Rolf. Yes, we shall perhaps have some diversion now all

our men are back from the wars. They are lively fellows these heroes.

Editha. Talk of heroes! Prince Alfred is a hero, if you will, now! If we had a few more Saxons like him the Danes would soon be cleared out of the country: they would drive them into the sea like so many wild geese.

Rolf. Yes, and tumble in after them, mistress, for in truth Alfred is as reckless as he is brave. Now I count a prudent spirit of self preservation to be the most serviceable quality in a warrior. For, look you, a man can only serve his country as long as his life lasts, and to make oneself a target for random shafts were very false philosophy. I had rather serve my country behind a stout hedge than weaken her defences by being run through the body.

Editha. I am sure what you say is mighty clever, but all the same I see you are just as jealous as can be. To begin with, you are as fond yourself of running unnecessary risks.

(Rolf hangs mistletoe on the lantern.)

Rolf. Oh, then, I suppose I may infer that I am another of those rare heroes you speak of. Madam, this unwonted favour overwhelms me. *(Editha darts a look of scorn at him.)* Now I begin to see your point. Yes, there is no denying that Alfred has a stout heart, and has thrown a bone to the Danish hound. We shall now be able to devote ourselves to the arts of peace. I for one am thinking of taking up house-keeping. Tell me Editha, thou pretty one, did'st never consider the question of matrimony?

Editha. Not in so many syllables, sir.

Rolf. But, frankly now, did'st never dream of a smiling hearth, a simmering pot, and a devoted retainer, whose only care is to anticipate your sigh?

Editha. Nay now, if it comes to sighing, I do not see wherein lies the advantage. You see, I have ample opportunity for enjoying the same luxury in my present estate.

Rolf. O most provoking lady, will you never understand plain sense from a plain speech?

Editha. Nay, I believe I have a very average understanding in the matter of prose, but when you *will* talk poetry I confess myself apt to go astray.

Rolf. Then will I speak plain prose. By this hand, fair Editha, I swear thou lovest me!

Editha. Troth, yes, I have a most universal charity!

Rolf. Art still unconvinced? Then will I prove my words by an infallible method of my own. Step to the light, fair lady, and let the magician read the secrets of your heart.

(Editha laughs and comes forward.)

Rolf. Fix your eyes steadily on mine and be careful, whatever happens, not to move or make a sound, lest that should break the spell.

(After a short pause under the lantern, Rolf bends suddenly and kisses Editha. Beowulf, who has watched the scene, comes forward.)

Beowulf. By my spear, what is this! My son fooling with a silly wench! Hey, sir, what are you about?

Rolf. Father, I will not hear this lady insulted; she is a gentlewoman of honourable family and I will avenge any insult offered to her with my life.

Beowulf. Out on thee and thy follies! Thou art a fool, boy! By my honour, if I thought thou wert in earnest thou shouldst contemplate thy follies in the stocks until reflection should restore thy reason. And now, here cometh the Cornish Ambassador. Get ye gone both of ye, and let me hear no more of this nonsense. *(Exit Beowulf.)*

Rolf (supporting Editha). Look up, sweet lady, and do not fear, I will defend thee with life. What could I not do armed with thy love? Let me see thee smile again, e'er we go.

(Exeunt together.)

(Enter Hengor, Cedric, Elfrida, Beric, and attendants.)

Hengor. My Lord Cedric, I come on behalf of Prince Ruan of Cornwall, my master, on a matter of great moment and deep feeling. *(To Elfrida.)* Lady, the noble prince sends you his most devoted and humble service, and, albeit, knowing his unworthiness to ask so great a favour, he seeks the honour of your hand in marriage. My noble master regrets that he has not been able to present his suit in person owing to the disturbed state of his kingdom, but he resigns his fate into the hands of your ladyship; and, if it be your will, trusts you will accept his offers in the person of your humble servant. *(He bows low to Elfrida.)*

Elfrida. My lord, I believe the noble Prince is already acquainted with my answer, and that my consent is the occasion of your presence. I am prepared, with the consent

of my honoured kinsman, to be betrothed by proxy to him whom my future lord has chosen to represent him. (*Sets herself.*)

Cedric. My Lord Hengor, we regret the absence of the noble Prince, but we congratulate him on having found so gallant a substitute. It will, indeed, be a grief to us to part with our dear niece; she has been for many years the joy of our household, and has filled in my affections the place of a daughter. But there is no one to whose care I would resign her so willingly as to that of your noble master. May all blessings attend her and her future lord.

(*Hengor and Editha affix their signatures to the betrothal document.*)

Cedric. That is well. Now we shall only await the happy day when the Prince himself shall be able to honour our roof with his presence to celebrate the marriage.

SCENE III. *The Same.*

(*Enter Beowulf and Rolf.*)

Beowulf. Ho! my son, you look sourly; hast lost the prey or has some wench's dark eye so stol'n the colour from your cheeks?

Rolf. Marry, sir, hast never loved? dost know what 'tis to see nothing but a pair of blue eyes? hear nothing but one voice and feel that the room is full of rosy light, or dark as any dungeon? (*sighs*). Truly, I think never did man love as I do.

Beowulf (*scowling*). Come, tell me, my son, who is't has so bewitched thee? I warrant me 'tis that wench I saw you fooling with last night. (*Aside.*) Sure I was but fifteen myself.

Rolf. Nay, sir, speak not jestingly of my passion, nor slightly of the fairest lady in the land. I warrant you could guess her name, 'tis Editha, the Lady Elfrida's tire-woman.

Beowulf. 'Tis a passing bit of folly, think no more on't, boy. I'll see to't that our Prince sends you 'gainst the Danes to keep you out of mischief.

Rolf. Sir, I wish not to seem ungrateful, for you have ever been a good father, but I swear to you that I will marry Editha whate'er befall (*lets his hand fall heavily on the table*).

Beowulf. What do you mean, lad? I'll have none of't.

Rolf. You forget, sir, that I am now a man (*strokes his upper lip*) and will not brook insult against the lady I love. I tell you she is the most—

Beowulf (*interrupting angrily*). You can well spare me her praises, I can guess them all beforehand. But what skill hath she, can she ply a needle or broider a 'kerchief?

Rolf. In sooth, sir, yea; her dainty fingers are clever, and (*eagerly*) by my troth can she sit her horse and fly a falcon better than any Saxon dame this side the Thames; she hath also a certain skill in herbs.

Beowulf. A truce now to this hobslobbering balderdash; (*stamps*) begone, I tell you, or by St. Olaf I'll—(*enter Editha, who goes confidently up to Rolf; Beowulf, mollified*) and wherefore do you intrude?

Editha (*saucily*). I have e'en now left my spinning wheel (*makes a grimace aside*) and was seeking you to ask advice upon a knotty matter, for I know well, good sir, you are stout-hearted, active and brave as any man.

Beowulf (*approvingly*). Say you so? (*aside*: Beshrew me 'tis a saucy wench, and sees deeper than is common among women); so, sweet chick, 'tis true that with your bright eyes and rosy lips you've drawn this foolish boy to his knees before you?

Editha. Oh, sir, he is no boy (*looks proudly up at Rolf, the look returned with interest*), but I wager could hold arms bravely against any knight in Wessex.

Beowulf. By my hilt, you speak bravely, and as one that is worthy of my son. You serve the Lady Elfrida, is it not so?

Editha. Aye, sir, there is no nobler in the land.

Beowulf. Well, well, I suppose we were all young once (*sighs*). My lass, your judgment leaves naught to be desired, and since both your hearts seem set upon this matter, upon one condition shall you wed.

Rolf and Editha (*eagerly*). You have but to name it, sir!

Beowulf. 'Tis that you serve faithfully the Lady Elfrida and shew yourselves worthy of such a mistress.

Rolf. Sir! You have lifted a ton weight off my heart. I thank you for your consent. (*Takes his father's hand*).

Editha (*puts her hand on Beowulf's arm*). And you have made me the happiest maid in Wessex.

Beowulf (*roughly*). But I'll have you both fulfil the condition

before this matter is spoken of again. (*To Rolf*). Now lad, away to work, and you—(*to Editha*)—what was the matter about which you would ask my aid?

Editha (*getting confused*). 'Twas—'twas, that knowing you to be a brave and— (*Enter Elfrida, Editha greatly relieved*).

Elfrida. Good morrow to you both! Why Editha, you look smilingly; has some good fortune fallen to your lot?

Editha (*blushing*). 'Tis e'en so, my lady.

Elfrida (*to Editha*). I pray you bear this pasty to our sick serf. (*Exit Editha, joyfully*). And you, good Beowulf, look to't that he is housed beneath our roof, for 'tis a bitter night.

Beowulf. My lady, he shall be lodged. (*Turns to go, then pauses*). What think you of our young Prince? It seems he is alike skilled in heraldry and learning. He gathers together the youth and teaches them to read the learned books; but for myself, I hold not with such foolery. If man can joust and ask for ale, 'tis little he wants to meddle with monkish work.

Elfrida. Nay, good Beowulf. It is a noble work that our Prince has undertaken. Is it not fitting that every man should know how to write his own language? (*Sits down*). And we lose the sayings of noble men for lack of translations. In sooth, it seems to me that from his cradle was Prince Alfred marked to be the founder of his nation. (*Enter Alfred. Stands aside*).

Beowulf. Lady, 'tis common talk 'mongst the ceorls that now's the time for Prince Alfred to bestir himself; it wants but the tinder spark to set aflame all Wessex in his favour, and by some 'tis thought likely he would not set himself 'gainst the wish of all the people.

Alfred. Good morrow to you, lady. What, do you talk of the scheme for taking arms against my brother?

Beowulf. I must away to business. (*Exit*).

Alfred (*musings*). I know not what to think. Surely if 'tis for the nation's good, it is well it were done; and yet to oust my brother, perchance to meet and kill him in battle! Ah! it is a horrible thought; it was but disclosed to me yesterday, and now has grown till methinks it is part of my being.

Elfrida. Pause, Alfred (*lays her hand on his arm*). It is true our nation's welfare seems even now at stake, the time for action

ripe. Who knows, perchance this trial is sent to prove your strength and to gird you for greater things; it is surely a great and terrible responsibility to have a nation's history depending on one's actions. Yet, courage, Alfred, methinks 'tis but a waiting time before the dawn; and see you what a noble thing it is to use the will that is given to you and wait?

Alfred. I thank you, lady. Now see I how you have helped me, and for this service do I render you heartfelt homage. (*Kneels and kisses Elfrida's hand*).

SCENE IV. Council Hall at Winchester.

Enter Cedric, Beric, Beowulf, Rolf, Hengor and followers.

Beric. Methinks 'tis near the hour of noon when our liege lord should come with his attendant train. For full an hour have I been waiting here, and yet the laggard minutes are not spent.

Cedric. Impatient as ever, Beric! But 'tis better to be an hour too soon than half a minute late.

Beowulf. You speak sooth, Cedric.

Hengor. But wherefore wait ye for the king? For what does he come here?

Beric. His brother, our Prince Alfred, is about to make a declaration, and the king has desired that his trusty thegns shall be present.

Hengor. "His trusty thegns." And who are they? Has not King Ethelbert supplanted his father and taken up the reins of government? If a son can wrest them from a father, might not a trusty thegn do likewise?

Cedric. You speak in riddles, which, methinks, it would be wiser to leave unread. But, Beowulf, what think you, shall we hence to meet our gracious king?

Beowulf. Be it as you say, Cedric. We will straightway join the escort. Come, Rolf. Hengor, we shall see you here anon.

(*Exeunt Cedric, Beric, Beowulf, and Rolf*).

Hengor. A word with both of you, and quickly too. I have a scheme which needs caution in the execution, and you must both be ready at my call.

1st Follower. Rely on us, we understand, good sir.

Hengor. If the feat succeed, you shall be well rewarded, and I will repay myself by taking for my own the Lady

Elfrida. (*Followers look dismayed.*) And have not I as much right to her as the prince? Am I not of noble birth?

2nd Follower. 'Tis even so, my lord. But when can such a deed be done?

Hengor. In this case, as before, I shall trust to seize occasion by the forelock.

1st Follower. By chance, it may not be difficult at the hunt to lead her palfrey astray, so that she is separated from the rest of the party.

Hengor. But soft, here comes the king. (*Exeunt Hengor and followers.*)

(*Enter in procession, to music, Beric and Rolf, Ethelbert and Alfred, Bishop, Cedric and Beowulf, Hengor and followers.*)

Alfred. I have considered with my brothers of the inheritance bequeathed to us by Ethelwulf, our father. And we give it in trust to Ethelbert the king, our brother, on condition that he shall deliver it back to us entire at a fit season.

Cedric. The young prince speaks wisely.

Bishop. He, at least, will give no example in high places of strife about the things of this life.

Alfred. In the hour of danger—and I fear there be many such in store for this kingdom of Wessex—I will stand loyally by my brother's side against our common foe. So, with a united kingdom, shall we be strong.

Rolf. All is now ready, my lord.

(*Alfred signs the parchment.*)

Ethelbert. I see the wisdom and generosity of this deed, for now we can make a stand against the Danes.

Bishop (*to Alfred*). And this may be but a waiting time in which to prepare for greater work hereafter.

Alfred. If my brother needs not my help in the field of battle, yet can I do my country service within the castle, for with the pen can I procure as great benefits for our people as with the sword.

Ethelbert. We give you greeting, Hengor, and would know how fares our brother of Cornwall.

Hengor. By me, his humble servant, he wishes to convey to you, my lord, his greetings, having sent me to seal his betrothal with the Lady Elfrida.

(*Exeunt in procession.*)

SCENE V. *Moorland hut in the snow.*

Enter Ethelbert and Beowulf.

Beowulf (*kneeling and kissing king's hand*). My gracious liege, your safety is assured. We have secured all the assassins.

Ethelbert (*eagerly*). Did you mark how nobly young Alfred fought? That ambush in the Red Glen might have staggered a veteran soldier. But he met the spears as fearlessly as if they were antlers or a boar's tusks.

Beowulf. Prince Alfred's fearless hunting has trained him in skill and coolness.

Ethelbert. I hope he will soon follow us. Methought he would have handed over the captives to our train long ere this.

Enter Alfred (with arm bound up), Beric and Editha.

Alfred. The Cornish traitors are captive. Hengor alone has escaped us for the present.

Ethelbert. But you are wounded, my brother!

Alfred. Merely a thrust in the hand, which has been bound up by this skilful maiden who has saved us all to-day.

Beric. It was she who discovered Hengor's plot to attack our princes at the hunt, and sent the messenger to warn us. I would that fortune had given me the chance!

Ethelbert. I wonder the Prince of Cornwall should have chosen as his ambassador a man without honour.

Alfred. There is worse to follow, my royal brother. Will you hear the maiden's tale?

Beric. My liege, I assure you, no minstrel's story could be more romantic.

Ethelbert. Peace, Beric, and let the maiden speak.

Editha (*reluctantly and blushing*). My lord, when the hunters were mounting this morning, there were three of Hengor's men talking darkly in the stable-yard as I passed by.

Beowulf (*abruptly*). And what was your business in the stable-yard, my lass?

Editha (*archly*). My lady Elfrida sometimes sends me with a message to her groom.

Ethelbert (*majestically impatient*). Let us hear the story, good Beowulf. What were the villains saying, Editha?

Editha. My lord, they were arguing hotly, and one cried, "We must waylay them in the Red Glen. The young princes cannot escape us there."

Beric. And why did you not seek me instantly, Editha? My reputation alone would protect the whole royal family!

Alfred. We do not doubt it, my friend! (*To Editha*). And had our party started when you heard this?

Editha. Yes, my lord; but one groom remained, delayed by a broken girth. I sent him to warn you.

Ethelbert. And thus we were prepared for this surprise and got the better of our foes. Editha, you merit praise for your prompt action, and shall be fitly rewarded. But how do you know that Hengor was party to the plot. Perhaps his men planned it out of national hatred.

Editha. My lord, as I re-entered the hall, I heard Hengor's voice saying passionately, "Look you, the Lady Elfrida meets the hunt to-day, and in the confusion about the king's disaster I will carry her off."

Alfred. The double traitor!

Ethelbert (anxiously). But is the Lady Elfrida safe?

Beric (admiringly). My liege, this dauntless maiden risked herself to save her mistress.

Editha (in excuse). My lord, the Lady Elfrida had long started. All the men had followed the hunt. I could think of no other plan but to disguise myself as the Lady Elfrida. I met Hengor as he rode out of the stables. "So you have not joined the hunt," he cried, astonished; "then, my lady, you shall take a ride with me"—and he caught me up, placed me before him on the saddle, and galloped away towards the Red Glen, where he doubtless expected to meet his followers.

Alfred. And there he rode into an ambush he little expected.

Beric (to the king). Would you have seen him, my liege, drop his prey and set his spurs to his horse. Young Rolf gave one cry at the sight of the maiden, then leapt into the saddle and vanished after Hengor, furious with jealous rage.

Beowulf. Is Rolf pursuing him alone?

Alfred. Yes, but Hengor was wounded, and I warrant you he will not be a match for Rolf.

Beric. His strength is as the strength of ten because his heart is touched!

Beowulf (generously). Maiden, you have served your mistress loyally, and shall wed my son if he returns in safety. I must go and seek him. (*Exit.*)

Beric (coming forward). And in his absence, let me fill the gap! (*tries to take her hand.*)

Ethelbert. We owe fervent thanks to all our loyal and faithful friends. And you, Alfred, my brother, have shown qualities which will stand you when you lead your people against the Danes.

SCENE VI. *Great Hall of Earl Cedric.*

Beowulf, Beric, and Rolf.

Beowulf (excitedly). True 'tis they saw a host approaching and banners gleaming.

Beric. Think you 'tis the Danes come back?

Rolf. Are all our troubles to begin again?

Beowulf. St. Olaf, help us if it be so. (*Enter Earl.*)

Earl. What means this turmoil? Is there no peace in my house?

Rolf. By your leave, my lord; there seems reason for it all.

Beric. I'll forth to meet them. Seeing me they'll have no appetite to come further. (*Enter Messenger.*) By the thorn! there comes one of them already. (*Springs towards messenger, but Rolf restrains him.*)

Messenger. I would speak with Earl Cedric.

Earl. He is here.

Messenger (kneeling). My master, the Prince of Cornwall, begs you to receive this his greeting. (*Hands a scroll.*)

Earl (unties scroll and reads). "To Earl Cedric. From the Prince of Cornwall. Greeting. I come to claim my bride." Well, man, I bid you say a welcome awaits your master, but right curtley makes he his request. (*Exit Messenger.*) Rolf, get you to Editha, bid her come to me. (*Exit Rolf.*)

Beowulf. Master, it behoves me to ask a blessing on this young pair.

Earl. Of whom speak you?

Beowulf. Surely of Rolf and Editha.

Earl. Ha! methought Rolf took him right eagerly on his message.

Beric. In faith, father, it has needed no keen eye to see that matter this long while (*laughs*).

(*Enter Rolf and Editha.*)

Beowulf. Come hither, maid. (*Editha goes prettily up to Beowulf, who puts his arm round her.*) Come hither, Rolf.

(*Rolf approaches*). Can you remember, maid, all that I said to you here in this hall but a short time since.

Editha. Right well, I do.

Rolf. Are not those conditions already fulfilled.

Beowulf (*holding a spray of mistletoe above their heads*)
Now methinks you both know what to do.

(*Tableau.*)

Beric. By my troth I could wish myself in Rolf's shoes, were they not too large for me.

(*Rolf and Editha approach Earl Cedric and kneel before him for a blessing.*)

Earl. All happiness be yours Editha, go beg the Lady Elfrida to come hither. (*Exit Editha.*)

(*Enter Alfred and Prince of Cornwall, procession following, Alfred stands aside, the Earl comes forward to receive the Prince.*)

Earl. Welcome, gracious Prince! This visit, though unforeseen, is welcome.

Prince (*haughtily*). I come thus to demand what reason has kept my ambassador so long. Many days have passed since I sent him on his mission of state, yet he returns not nor vouchsafes me word.

Alfred (*to Cedric*). I pray you let me speak. (*To the Prince*) Prince, that baron in whom you trusted has shewn himself unworthy of all confidence. No sooner was he here than he made a plot to undermine the loyalty of the trusted servants of the king, my brother.

Prince. Surely this cannot be!

Alfred. That this is so, all will bear witness. Sad it is to tell, yet you must know. Had Hengor carried out his plan he would have had the king murdered. Know, however, that the king is safe at Winchester.

Prince. Merciful heaven! my heart throbs with thankfulness to know that this villainy has come to nought.

Alfred. Yet, hear further. Not content with this traitorous work, Hengor cast eyes of desire upon the Lady Elfrida and plotted to carry her off.

Prince. So, even to this he could go! My trusted servant Hengor, is it thus you return my love and confidence?

Beric. In this, too, he has failed. The Lady Elfrida is unharmed and ready to receive my lord the Prince. And

know that the treachery of Hengor is already punished; lifeless he lies, a victim to his own villainy.

Prince. 'Tis meet and should beso, yet must I ever grieve over the downfall of one who was accounted my most trusted friend.

Alfred. Prince, I share your sorrow. . . . But see, here comes the Lady Elfrida. (*Enter Elfrida.*)

(*Prince kneels before her.*)

Prince. My gracious lady, scarce dare I ask for pardon, knowing all that has been done by Hengor in my name.

Elfrida. No pardon is needed; the offence was not of your making, and though Hengor has brought trouble upon us, no harm has come to any but himself. Indeed I grieve for him.

Prince. Your graciousness overwhelms me. So I may dare to claim the bride for whom I have waited? (*Elfrida extends her hand which the Prince kisses, rising.*) Lady, I have no words; yet may the future shew you my devotion.

Alfred (*to the Prince*). Your gain means our great loss. Scarcely can we picture this household without the presence of the Lady Elfrida. Yet, we must wish her happiness. (*To Elfrida*) Lady, sad we are to let you go, but the influence of your sweet presence will remain with us, and we shall try and live as you would have us live, bravely and worthily.

Elfrida. The time of parting is ever sad, yet it must be so. You say I have been of help to you, and I am glad. Now it is best for you to stand alone. Thus you will grow in strength and become more fitted for the great task which is before you. You will live so worthily, as to leave behind to all men the remembrance of a great king.

Suggestions for Scenery.

Pictures of the correct costumes may be found in illustrated histories such as *Green or Knight*; the latter gives illustrations which can be roughly copied in chalks on brown paper, making excellent tapestries for the hall. Logs piled round a lamp with thin pink paper in front make an effective fireplace. Scene V. should be the interior of a hut with door and window disclosing the snowy scene outside. The walls of the hut can be made with brown paper, shaded with charcoal to look like planks. Cardboard and gold and silver paper come in for spears and helmets.

[The above little play was written and acted by the first-year students of the House of Education. It was a hasty production, but it occurs to the Editor that the families in which the study of "Alfred the Great" has been part of the term's work may find it amusing to act these scenes. The hunt for the right costumes, &c., will be profitable, and the actors will discern what is historical and what fictitious.]